

PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee Bob Stump, Chairman

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OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BOB STUMP AT HEARING ON FY 2002 AIR FORCE BUDGET

Today, the committee begins its review of the fiscal year 2002 budget requests of the military services starting with the Air Force. The committee will hear from the Navy and Marine Corps tomorrow and the Army will follow next Wednesday.

I am pleased to welcome Secretary of the Air Force James Roche and Chief of Staff General Mike Ryan to testify on the Air Force's budget request for fiscal year 2002. This hearing marks Secretary Roche's first appearance before the committee. Mr. Secretary, congratulations on your confirmation and I look forward to working with you in the years ahead.

Two weeks ago, Secretary Rumsfeld testified that this budget request represents a stopgap measure pending the completion of the Department of Defense's comprehensive strategy review. I continue to believe that this is a sound approach as resources must flow from the strategy and not the other way around.

Nevertheless, the conduct of the ongoing strategy review and the delay in submitting a fiscal year 2002 budget amendment has significantly complicated our oversight process. Consequently, Mr. Secretary, it is critical that the Air Force provide this committee with the additional budget detail and materials necessary for us to complete our work with minimal delay.

The Air Force budget before us represents real improvement in the areas of personnel quality of life and near-term readiness. The \$9.4 billion increase above the fiscal year 2001 request funds pay raises, enhanced housing opportunities for military families, recruiting and retention initiatives, and aircraft maintenance and spares. But, most all decisions on major modernization and transformation programs are deferred. In the meantime, our equipment continues to age and the cost of maintaining our shrinking fleet of aircraft grows every year.

Pilot shortages continue and readiness rates are still down due to prior year underfunding. These problems will take years to solve. But, I believe this budget moves the Air Force in the right direction. The challenge will be to continue this increased level of investment in the years ahead.

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